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Defector Howard goes on Soviet TV

By Bill Gertz
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Former CIA operative Edward Lee Howard, in his first public interview since he defected to the Soviet Union, yesterday denounced the "militarist spirit" of the CIA and said he sought asylum because "I got tired of life on the run."

In a Soviet television interview with commentator Genrykh Borovik, Howard said the Soviet Union is "the No. 1 target" of the CIA. He described the agency's Soviet operations section as "the sacred part of the CIA" and said its officials were "very hostile" toward the Soviets.

Mr. Borovik, who often produces television shows about the CIA, said he interviewed Howard in "a Moscow suburb" where the defector lives. He said Howard was the first CIA employee to have sought asylum in the Soviet Union.

Asked why he came to the Soviet Union, Howard, who eluded an FBI hunt for almost a year, said: "I wanted to live openly and I wanted no one to threaten my safety. You can't hide from the CIA for your whole life."

Earlier, U.S. News & World Report correspondent Nicholas Daniloff, whom the Soviets have charged with espionage, said he suspected Howard would try to implicate him in spying activities with "inside information."

"Should that happen, we'll be in a situation where his credibility — that is to say, an American defector in Soviet hands — will be pitted against the credibility of President Reagan, a man who speaks freely from the White House, and my credibility," Mr. Daniloff said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

But the CIA defector made no mention of the Daniloff case.

Howard, according to U.S. officials, became disgruntled and left the agency in 1983 after his assignment to join the CIA's Moscow station was canceled when he failed a lie detector test. According to an FBI affidavit, he supplied CIA secrets to the Soviets during a meeting in Austria three years ago.

Howard said in the 50-minute television interview that he had been trained to recruit agents in the Soviet Union and to make contact with Soviet citizens spying for the CIA. He denied that his defection had harmed U.S. security.

"I never did anything that would damage or threaten my country's security," he said.

According to U.S. officials, Howard is suspected of exposing CIA operations in Moscow, including the identities of several CIA officers. He is also suspected of identifying a CIA agent — or "mole" — within the Soviet aviation industry in Moscow.

The official TASS news agency last week described the mole as "the traitor [A.G.] Tblkachev" and said he had been "sentenced to death."

Intelligence analysts viewed the Howard interview as part of a larger Soviet propaganda campaign. It was broadcast during a heated media campaign against U.S. intelligence operations that began after the arrest of Mr. Daniloff.

"Howard is singing from the sheet of music the KGB has put before him," said former CIA official George Carver, now with Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"The Soviets are now embarked on what would appear to be a fairly systematic effort to blacken Daniloff and to suggest that there was in fact an intelligence connection when there wasn't," Mr. Carver said in an interview.

This article is based in part on wire service reports.